

LISTING OF CLAIMS**1-20. (Canceled)****21. (New)** A method comprising:

receiving a data signal formatted according to a data communication protocol at a software data communication platform, the software data communication platform to support one or more data communication protocols;

determining if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by a hardware data communication platform, the hardware data communication platform to support a data communication protocol not supported by the software data communication platform, the hardware data communication platform having a filter engine with a filter path to process a data signal for routing and a by-pass path to route the data signal through the filter engine without processing the data signal by the filter engine; and

if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform, indicating to the hardware data communication platform to receive the data signal at the filter path to process the data signal with the hardware data communication platform, or else to receive the data signal at the by-pass path to process the data signal with the software data communication platform.

22. (New) A method according to claim 21, wherein the hardware communication protocol includes one or more application specific integrated circuits (ASICs).

23. (New) A method according to claim 21, wherein determining if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform comprises comparing the data communication protocol of the data signal to a data communication protocol

included in a lookup table indicating the data communication protocols supported by the hardware data communication platform.

24. (New) A method according to claim 23, wherein the lookup table is stored on the hardware data communication platform.

25. (New) A method according to claim 21, wherein indicating to the hardware data communication platform to receive the data signal at the filter path or the by-pass path comprises tagging header information to the data signal to indicate the path.

26. (New) An article of manufacture comprising:

a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of machine-executable instructions, which when executed, cause a machine to perform operations including:

receiving a data signal formatted according to a data communication protocol at a software data communication platform, the software data communication platform to support one or more data communication protocols;

determining if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by a hardware data communication platform, the hardware data communication platform to support a data communication protocol not supported by the software data communication platform, the hardware data communication platform having a filter engine with a filter path to process a data signal for routing and a by-pass path to route the data signal through the filter engine without processing the data signal by the filter engine; and

if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform, indicating to the hardware data communication platform to receive the data signal at the filter path to process the data signal with the hardware data communication

platform, or else to receive the data signal at the by-pass path to process the data signal with the software data communication platform.

27. (New) An article of manufacture according to claim 26, wherein the hardware communication protocol includes one or more application specific integrated circuits (ASICs).

28. (New) An article of manufacture according to claim 26, wherein the instructions to cause determining if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform comprises instructions to cause comparing the data communication protocol of the data signal to a data communication protocol included in a lookup table indicating the data communication protocols supported by the hardware data communication platform.

29. (New) An article of manufacture according to claim 28, wherein the lookup table is stored on the hardware data communication platform.

30. (New) An article of manufacture according to claim 26, wherein the instructions to cause indicating to the hardware data communication platform to receive the data signal at the filter path or the by-pass path comprises instructions to cause tagging header information to the data signal to indicate the path.

31. (New) An apparatus comprising:

a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of machine-executable instructions, which when executed, cause the apparatus to perform operations including receiving a data signal formatted according to a data communication protocol at a software data communication platform, the software data communication platform to support one or more data communication protocols, determining if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by a hardware data communication platform, the hardware data communication platform to support a

data communication protocol not supported by the software data communication platform, the hardware data communication platform having a filter engine with a filter path to process a data signal for routing and a by-pass path to route the data signal through the filter engine without processing the data signal by the filter engine, and, if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform, indicating to the hardware data communication platform to receive the data signal at the filter path to process the data signal with the hardware data communication platform, or else to receive the data signal at the by-pass path to process the data signal with the software data communication platform; and a processor coupled to the storage medium to execute the instructions.

32. (New) An apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the hardware communication protocol includes one or more application specific integrated circuits (ASICs).

33. (New) An apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the instructions to cause determining if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform comprises instructions to cause comparing the data communication protocol of the data signal to a data communication protocol included in a lookup table indicating the data communication protocols supported by the hardware data communication platform.

34. (New) An apparatus according to claim 33, wherein the lookup table is stored on the hardware data communication platform.

35. (New) An apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the instructions to cause indicating to the hardware data communication platform to receive the data signal at the filter path or the by-pass path comprises instructions to cause tagging header information to the data signal to indicate the path.

36. (New) An apparatus comprising:

a network processor to execute a software data communication platform, the software data communication platform to support one or more data communication protocols, the software data communication platform to receive a data signal formatted according to a data communication protocol, and determine if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by a hardware data communication platform; and

a network switch circuit coupled to the network processor to include an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC) to execute a hardware data communication platform, the hardware data communication platform to support a data communication protocol not supported by the software data communication platform, the ASIC to include a filter engine having a filter path to process a data signal for routing and a by-pass path to route the data signal through the filter engine without processing the data signal by the filter engine, the network switch circuit to receive the data signal at the filter path to process the data signal with the hardware data communication platform if the network processor indicates the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform, or else to receive the data signal at the by-pass path to process the data signal with the software data communication platform if the network processor indicates the data communication protocol of the data signal is not supported by the hardware data communication platform.

37. (New) An apparatus according to claim 36, the network processor to determine if the data communication protocol of the data signal is supported by the hardware data communication platform comprises the network processor to compare the data communication protocol of the data signal to a data communication protocol included in a lookup table indicating the data communication protocols supported by the hardware data communication platform.

38. (New) An apparatus according to claim 37, wherein the lookup table is stored on the ASIC.

39. (New) An apparatus according to claim 36, wherein the instructions to cause indicating to the hardware data communication platform to receive the data signal at the filter path or the by-pass path comprises instructions to cause tagging header information to the data signal to indicate the path.